2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3



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Président passé là,
L'ap monté au gouvernment! [Ex. 118]

The President passes by,
He is taking over the government!
The President passes by,
He is taking over the government!

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It is not only great political events that are perpetuated in songs like these; many are the comments on little people in the government, such as a legislator named Daniel Fignolé. One of Fignolé's deeds, probably apocryphal, which is recorded in folk song has to do with an act of justice in a hospital in Port-au-Prince. According to the song, Fignolé entered the hospital and found the rich patients on beds and the poor patients on mats on the floor. He promptly ordered the rich patients placed on the floor and the poor patients placed on the beds. (A few years later, after serving as president for less than three weeks, Fignolé became a political exile in the United States.)

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There is also an old song about a government engineer named Louis Gentil Tippenhauer—or Ti 'Benhauer (Little 'Benhauer), as he was commonly known. Tippenhauer is now an old man, but when he was young he was in charge of the construction of a section of the Haitian narrow-gauge railway. There was an accident in which a smoking locomotive jumped the tracks. Though small in stature, Tippenhauer had a forceful personality. He quickly assembled his workmen, and with chains, ropes, and crowbars they wrestled the locomotive back on the rails. The song commemorating the dramatic event was born at the height of the rescue operation. It is marked with concern for the feelings of Engineer Tippenhauer:

*[539]

Ti 'Benhauer rélé, "Porté cord pou' marré li!"
Ti 'Benhauer rélé, "Porté chaine pou' enchainé li!"
Si ou marré'l la laguè, devant Bondieu!
Pau' diab', pau' 'Benhauer, machine na deraillé!
Pau' diab', pau' 'Benhauer, machine na deraillé!

Ti 'Benhauer shouts, "Bring a rope to tie it!"
Ti 'Benhauer shouts, "Bring a chain to chain it!"
If you tie it, it unties itself, before God!
Poor devil, poor 'Benhauer, the machine is derailed!
Poor devil, poor 'Benhauer, the machine is derailed!

It is more than half a century since the affair of the derailed locomotive, and the railroad itself is not much longer for this world. But the song is still sung, and mostly by people who have no personal knowledge of the man named Tippenhauer.